

TO: Mike, Larry, Lis, Joel
FROM: Katie Connolly
RE: Report from South Carolina Focus Groups Among Af Am Voters
DATE: July 21, 2019

Methodology

On Tuesday, July 16, 2019 Benenson Strategy Group conducted three focus groups among uncommitted African American likely primary voters in Columbia, South Carolina. The groups were divided by gender and age and lasted approximately 90 minutes each.

- *Group 1: African American Women, 40-65 years old*
- *Group 2: African American Women, 25-40 years old*
- *Group 3: African American Men, 25-65 years old*

Key Findings

Overall, these voters are not following the race and know little of the Mayor. Only a handful in each group knew who he was and only one was seriously considering him. They also knew almost nothing about the Eric Logan shooting. Only a couple in each group even claimed to have heard about it, and even then, the details were hazy. Much of what we showed them in the groups tonight was their first introduction to him.

Being gay was a barrier for these voters, particularly for the men who seemed deeply uncomfortable even discussing it. It was not necessarily a red line that they wouldn't cross and many of the voters – particularly the older women – seemed genuinely intrigued by the Mayor after hearing more. But their preference is for his sexuality to not be front and center.

After seeing the Mayor speak, most voters in each group seemed to be able to get past his sexual orientation. Most found his eloquence and presentation style to be appealing. But they are going to need to see real **demonstrations of broad enthusiasm** and likely some endorsements from “cool” black people to **help them believe that “other people” don't have a problem with it** and it won't be a vulnerability in a general election match up with Trump.

As with the post-debate groups in Iowa, these voters really **felt the Mayor lacked passion, anger and “pizazz”**. Though they appreciate his tone and composure generally – a couple said he reminded them of Obama, one said JFK – they want to see some force and fire when discussing difficult things. To paraphrase, if a man died, you should be upset and angry. If the body camera was off, you should be angry.

For the older women, **talking about faith was a real winner** and pushed them past their doubts. From these groups, it would appear that **older women are probably our best targets in the community**. We need to test further and validate in the quant, but given their faith and strong propensity to turn out, it's likely that focusing on older women will our most effective way to make inroads with black South Carolinians.



But the context of criticizing the GOP for their corruption of Christian values was key to unlocking older women. They understood immediately that he was slapping down Republicans for false beliefs and loved that he was taking the fight to them and seizing religion back for our side. Other groups didn't recognize the reference to supposedly Christian Republicans as readily, and talk of his faith was less appealing. They also did not recognize the passages from Scripture as readily as the older women, who embraced it and saw it as a rebuke of "Two Corinthians" Trump.

- A couple of men saw his faith talk as disingenuous given his sexuality. Some of the younger women wondered if he was just paying lip service to appeal to black voters.
- This idea that he's just saying all the right things to appeal to them recurred several times, particularly with the younger women, who will need to see him making similar arguments in front of white audiences so they truly believe him. They don't know him well enough to know if he walks the walk.

Generally his response on South Bend and his discussion of the Douglass Plan were well received, especially his contextualizing the problem as systemic racism. He came across as sincere and genuine. But **we must remember that black voters are highly pragmatic** and are skeptical of politicians who appear to be doing a lot of talking – they've been made promises too many times before. More so than other groups, **black voters need to concrete plans**, outcomes and facts, not flowery explanations.

This pragmatism extends to their desire for a tested leader who can get wins when going up against McConnell and congressional Republicans. **They were skeptical that the Mayor – given his age and resume (mayor) – was ready for the big leagues of Washington.** They find it hard to believe that if Barack Obama struggled with Congress, that a young, new face would be able to make progress, especially on issues as tough as racism and inequality.

- This underscores our previous findings that our focus needs to be less on validating PB's experience, and more on his ability to **get results and have the toughness and resolve necessary to do so.**

The affinity voters in these groups felt for Joe Biden was deep and strong, and was drawn heavily from his relationship with Barack Obama who is the ultimate validator. **It's hard to underestimate the power of the Obama association with these voters.** Because of the Obama halo, they are very forgiving of Biden's transgressions and make allowances for his past views because they see him as having good intentions. They recognize that Biden is a product of his time and that he probably held views in the past that were in keeping with that time, but he's changed as the culture has.

Because of this enduring affection for Biden, Harris' attack on him at the debate was not particularly well received. While some of the women gave her plaudits for her passion and the men appreciated that it was smart strategy, attacking Biden felt "below the belt" to some – particularly on an issue (bussing) they felt was obscure and many of the



younger participants didn't understand at all. They worked hard to find ways to give Biden credit for his response to her.

- *"I thought [Biden] was a little jumpy but I started to remember he was Obama's vice president. **Obama chose him, so Obama obviously saw some good in him** or he would not have appointed him as vice president. **I can't forget that.** So, I know Biden probably grew up back in the day. Back then, everybody had the same thoughts a lot of them had about us back in the day and then, sometimes you have to grow out of it eventually. **I feel Obama liked the guy and he always praised him and he was the vice president.** I thought he did a good job."* – Male

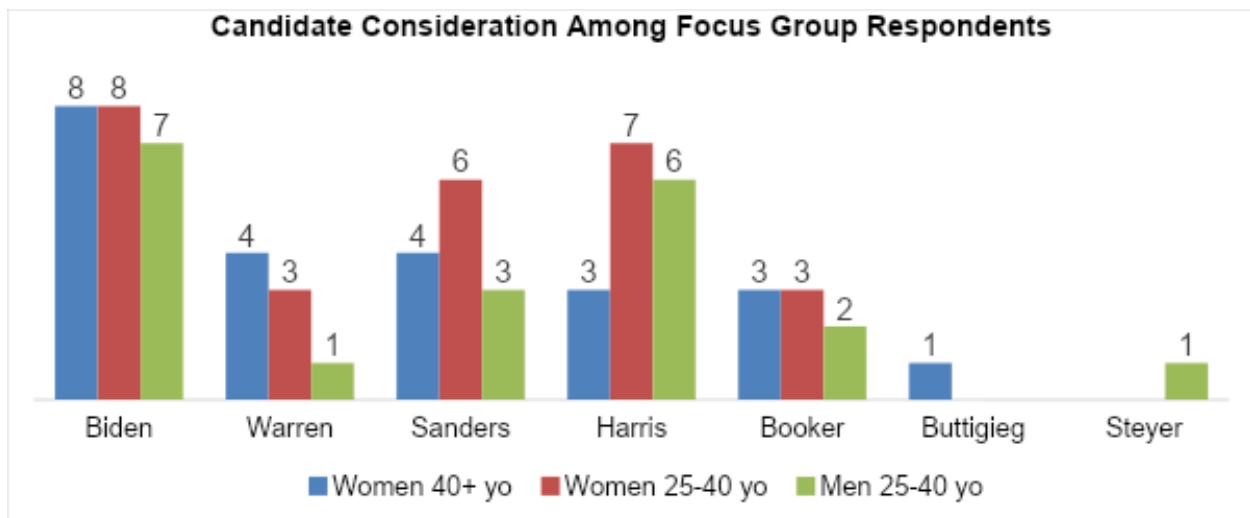
The response to Kamala was fairly muted. They see potential in her ("great VP") but do worry that America won't elect a black woman. They see her as clever, passionate and hungry for the win, but aren't totally sold on her yet, especially after her attack on Biden which some wrote off as a naked ploy for black voters.

Booker was only briefly mentioned as someone who seemed connected and kind, but not a top contender.

Detailed Findings

Overall dynamics

Though none of these voters were fully committed to a candidate, the clear and dominant front runner was Joe Biden. All **but one voter** (a man who was considering Sanders and Warren) named him on their list of candidates they're seriously considering. Just one woman (over 40 years old) had Mayor Pete on her list.



Likely because these voters were not paying a lot of attention to the race, consideration sets weren't very diverse. Nearly all were a combination of Biden, Sanders, Warren and Harris, with Booker sprinkled throughout.

- The only outliers in the group were one man who had Tom Steyer on his and one older woman who included the Mayor on hers.



As we expected, these South Carolina voters have little awareness of the Mayor – just **9 out of 24 recognized his name**. While this suggests growth potential, it also underscores the importance of the debates in creating viral “moments” that can really break through to low information voters.

- Recognition of him was mostly driven by women over 40, six of whom had heard of him.

In general, they aren’t keeping up with every twist and turn in the race. Less than half watched any of the first debates, and of those, quite a few of them only watched highlights.

The sheer number of candidates running feels overwhelming for them. They don’t feel to feel like they can “keep up” and **are frankly eager for the field to thin out and get serious**.

The issue areas they are most invested in mirror those of most early state democrats – health care, education/student loans, the economy and criminal justice. They haven’t given a lot of thought to the specifics they want to see and aren’t really sure which candidates own which issue, aside from a general sense that Bernie and Warren are talking about student loans and healthcare.

- However, the women over 40 are paying closer attention to the race than the younger women and men. For them, family separation and kids in cages were a priority too. Mostly mothers, their reactions seemed deeply emotional and real.
 - It’s important to note that these women were focused solely on the abhorrence of family separations, not immigration writ large – many in the community are skeptical of progressive immigration policies.

[Exchange – Women, 40+]

*Female 1: “Immigration. Not even that. I want the children out of cages. You can talk about anything else. **I want the kids out of those cages.**”*

*Female 2: “I will piggyback on to what you’re saying. **I want those kids reunited with their families.**”*

- One older woman recalled hearing about the Douglass Plan, but didn’t know many specifics.

***“Buttigieg is talking about [a plan] as it relates to reparations...I don’t think monetary reparations is a reality, that there’s a lot more that could be fixed that needs to be fixed on criminal reform in our school system.”** – Female, 40+*

When they spoke about their desire for a politician who can deliver, frustrations surfaced. These voters have been let down before and are distrustful of yet another politician coming to their state making promises, getting into office then doing little for their communities.

- Voters – particularly younger voters - need to see a side of Mayor Pete that is decisive and action-oriented. When laying out something like the Douglass Plan,



these voters are more likely than most to be interested in specific, concrete ideas than generalized descriptions. They like the diagnosis, but it's meaningless without a real action plan.

*"They have speeches or whatever and everything sounds so great... then all of a sudden once they get elected things change and **they don't go by or try to follow what they've [said].**" – Female, <40*

*"I think, to be honest with you, a lot of the candidates kind of **use us as guinea pigs to get that vote.**" – Female, <40*

*"Basically whatever they say they're going to do, **[candidates] need to stick to it.**"*

– Female, <40

Clearly beating Trump is top of mind for these voters who basically suggested they'll get behind whoever the nominee is to get rid of him.

- A handful didn't feel it's going to be that much of an uphill battle.

[Exchange – Men]

Moderator: "The reason that [beating Trump] is not important for you, it's not a priority?"

*Male: "Because I don't think he'll win again. I think a Democratic president next the time... **If we can get the right candidate.**"*

They mostly believe things are going to be different than in 2016.

*"I think what happened last time is that of course it shocked a lot of people but a lot of people stayed home. They're coming out to vote and I think that those people now realize what that caused so **I don't think those people will be staying home this time.**"*

– Female, 40+

But as we've seen consistently, voters do not want to see their candidate stoop to Trump's level or engage in his pettiness. Though they want someone tough enough to go toe-to-toe, they're not looking for someone to emulate Trump's style.

*"If [the candidate] is not playing Trump's game. If he's not doing the mudslinging. If he's not talking bad about him. That's what Trump invites. He wants you to play the game with him. **If you don't play his game, you can beat him.**" – Male*

Pete's Bio: Transforming South Bend

For nearly all the voters, this was their first real introduction to the Mayor. After reading a short bio, their reactions to his bio were largely positive. They gravitated quickly toward his transformation South Bend, with a particular emphasis on new jobs and opportunities for workers.

"I mean being able to take something that's declining, a community, and especially – honestly and truly, right now for me, the African American communities, the economic disparities -



being able to take those communities and being able to make them thrive.” – Female, 40+

“I like the fact that he’s creating new jobs and opportunities for workers and making other people feel safe in the communities where they live in and thrive and feel safe where they are. That’s what stood out to me.” – Male

The Mayor’s ability to transform South Bend also resonated with them because it demonstrates that he can deliver on his word.

“He’s sticking to his word. He helped people. A lot of people want new jobs and new opportunities and I think that’s very important, especially now. I think everybody wants to feel safe and included in the community that we live in.” – Female, <40

They also strongly connected with the Mayor’s emphasis on building a community in South Bend where everyone – regardless of race, religion, gender, or orientation – could feel safe and included.

“I’m from New York originally and so I was up there when they did the gentrification in Harlem and so you saw a lot of families that grew up in the Brownstones and then they bought it from underneath them for pennies and now they’re worth millions of dollars. You don’t feel included in a neighborhood like that even if you were born and raised, so that’s one of the things that **stood out with me, was that everybody, regardless of race, gender, you feel like you’re a part of the community.**” – Female, 40+

“That shows that he’s helping all people, not just one specific group of people. I just feel like the safe thing, it’s important to feel safe where you’re at, where you’re working and where you’re living at, your community.” – Female, <40

His military experience was wholly positive and their knowledge of this in his background triggered a direct contrast with Trump.

“I find it interesting that Trump talks so much and is creating so much drama, but him nor his family for generations have never gone to war. So, to me, **you don’t understand what you put these families and these service people through.** They already don’t get what they deserve when they get back. So, I feel like someone who has experienced it can really understand and make better decisions before starting and creating these problems.” – Female, <40

[Exchange – Women, 40+]

Female 1: “I thought it was **admirable** that he took an unpaid seven-month leave.”

Female 2: “He served. **He didn’t have foot spurs or whatever.**”

For some, the Mayor’s age gave voters pause. They see *potential for down the road*, but like we’ve already discussed in other research, they need to know that he’s the guy for *now*.

“He sounds like a typical person that can **start building their portfolio to become a president candidate.**” – Female, <40



*"One thing I noticed, he's fairly young. **I mean I think that's kind of young** – so one thing that stood out for me was his age." – Female, 40+*

Though his focus on service even though he's young age did communicate to them a sense of compassion and care.

*"The only thing I'm really solid about is he's a 37-year-old mayor meaning that **he always had in mind about the people, about the community.**" – Female, <40*

*"[Making other people feel safe in the communities where they live say] **he's a person who cares about people. He's empathetic.**" – Male*

Reservations about the Mayor's age combined with his experience as a small-town Mayor prompted some doubts about his readiness to play in the big leagues of Congress.

- An ability to actually execute on plans when faced with Republican intransigence in Congress was a repeated theme. In part this was driven by what they had seen Obama go through, and if Obama couldn't get it done, they're skeptical about others.

*"[He] **looks very young**...He doesn't quite have the experience. A mayor in South Bend Indiana, **he might not have experienced the big Washington politics.**" – Male*

*"I just think it's a **whole different ballgame when you're talking about congress** and having to take stuff before congress. **We already saw what Obama went through with trying to get bills passed.** I don't think he's at that level of intensity." – Female, <40*

But age did not seem to be an insurmountable barrier, particularly among older women who could see real benefit in a new perspective.

*"I don't have concerns. I think it's good. I think **we need a younger perspective.** I think we need to let young people start coming up and having accountability for some of these politics. **I think they're more fair than maybe the old school,** old time – I think **we need to start having some younger individuals that are more open to things.**"*

– Female, 40+

*"**I do like the fact that he is younger.** I think he may be able to identify with a group of people who don't necessarily believe in the voting system, who have lost hope in what the democracy is supposed to stand for." – Female, 40+*

Pete's Bio: Being Gay

Though not a disqualifier, being gay was a barrier for these voters, particularly men and younger women. After reading his bio, they questioned why he had to even bring it up.

- Note: The only reference to his sexual orientation was that he lived with his husband, Chasten.

*"That's not my thing but I **wouldn't want to know that as a candidate.** I just want to know what you can bring to the table versus your personal...**Especially when you come to the husband. That was too much information.**" – Female, <40*



"It's like 'Hey, you can kind of leave that to the side until we get some solid information about you?' Do you know what I'm saying? You can leave personal business out for right now. Let's focus on describing some of the main things that America needs to get handled. – Female, <40

Men were deeply uncomfortable with even discussing it. When the moderator asked if they had any concerns with the bio, there was an uncomfortable silence until one man said "honestly?" and the whole room erupted in laughter – they all knew what the issue was and none of them wanted to be the first to say it.

- They felt as though the Mayor was "flaunting" his sexuality by the very mention of having a husband.

*"I'll go ahead and say it. I don't like the fact that he **threw out there** that he lives with his husband." – Male*

*"I mean, if you want [be gay], then go ahead and do it. [Laughter] It seems like, so often, everybody is **just throwing it out there and publicizing or just trying to bring it to the forefront of just everything**...I, personally don't have a problem with it, but..." – Male*

As we've heard previously, even though many made it clear they personally didn't have a problem with the Mayor's sexuality, they felt like *others* would have a problem with it and weaponize it (i.e., Republicans and their voters, Trump).

*"I do understand that when he was in South Bend, he was able to turn everything around but **we're talking about needing a candidate who is going to have everything in line to defeat Trump**." – Male*

[Exchange – Women, 40+]

Female, 1: "A lot of Republicans are not going for that."

Female 2: "They're not going to have it."

Female 3: "Even some Democrats too."

*Female 1: "Even some Democrats too, but I'm saying it's more heavy-handed on – we're a little more acceptable to that. **I don't think he's going to be able to be the one to bridge the gap**. I mean it'd be interesting, but it's not going to happen."*

Female 3: "Maybe by the time he's 50?"

Some masked their concerns by suggesting that it wouldn't fly with other countries and questioned their capacity to accept a gay leader.

*"I think his orientation can be a double-edged sword for him because for one group, it might work, but for another group, it may not. **Especially in terms of being relatable to other nations and what have you, are they going to relate to him with a husband?**"*

– Female, 40+

A couple of men went as far as to suggest it would make our leader look "weak" on an international stage. These dem primary voters may think of themselves as liberal but the still have very old-school, difficult views of masculinity.

[Exchange – Men, on the Mayor being gay]

Moderator: "How about for you? Does it bother you?"



Male: “Yes. Not in the sense of that he’s gay, **it’s just a sense that other countries are looking at us weak**, and we need someone in the position right now as a strong leader coming from what we have now, and that’s the only reason I think that would hurt him, in my opinion.”

Yet at the same time, some of these Black voters – even the men – admitted (some begrudgingly) that because of his sexual orientation, the Mayor experience adversity and discrimination and would be able to relate to their own struggles, though in a different way.

- Important: White privilege doesn’t just disappear amid discrimination for something else. If you’re white and gay, you’re still better off, as one woman pointed out.

“Since he is gay, **I think maybe he can understand pushing for rights He understands being discriminated against** because that’s one form of discrimination, **but I think gays are getting a lot more than we have.**” – Female, 40+

“I think he gets it just because of the situation and that goes a lot – a long way how you deal with life and how do you see things from your personal experiences. And **he can probably you know sympathize with Black people.**” – Male

Of all the groups, older women were the ones who were most capable of moving past his sexual orientation. They came away from his bio impressed and intrigued. But still – they’d prefer not to focus on it.

“I thought his bio was shining. I thought it was a **stellar bio** – military service, he’s turned the city around. **I thought, ‘Wow.’**” – Female, 40+

“I know there’s going to be that **one little thing that holds him back**. I’m fine with it, **to each their own, but...**” – Female, 40+

Reaction to South Bend Shooting / Race Answer at Debate

Apart from a few older women, these voters had not been following the story around what’s happening in South Bend closely. Only a handful knew any real details about it, but even then, the details were pretty hazy.

One older woman knew significantly more about this story than her peers in the other groups, revealing real skepticism of the Mayor for how he handled the raw emotions of his town’s residents in the town hall.

“I just keep thinking about this **clip of him going back to his community** and his community addressing him and the reaction that he gave his community, because his community knows him better than the rest of the United States and **they were coming at him**. There were some things that he could’ve done, so I wasn’t impressed with him. I just thought it was kind of a cop out.” – Female, 40+

“I mean he put on a good show there [in the debate] **[but] when he went back home, they were saying, ‘You’ve known about these issues for a while now.’**”



– Female, 40+

In general, the Mayor's answer at the debate was well received. Taking responsibility was a winner with these groups.

*"When he said that he just couldn't get the job done, **that's taking accountability and not blaming somebody else.**" – Female, 40+*

*"I like that he didn't sugarcoat anything or talk around the issue. **He really went right in and addressed it.**" – Female, 40+*

While they recognize that what happened in South Bend isn't uniquely Mayor Pete's problem – it's unquestionably America's problem – some voters pointed out that when you're a mayor of a small town, you're intimately involved with the people of the community and you have significant power. That made them wonder again whether he was ready for the big league of Washington politics.

[Exchange – Women, 40+]

Moderator: "How much blame does a mayor have to take in these kinds of situation?"

Female 1: "A hundred percent."

*Female 2: "**I don't want to hear an excuse** like, 'Oh well, I can't do that.' **No, you can do it.** You can do whatever you want to do."*

*"Personally I don't [think he can fix this problem as president] because again South Bend is a city and we're talking about a nation here. **So if you can't do it on a smaller scale, how do you plan on doing it on larger scale?**" – Male*

*"I just think by him being a mayor, **he is directly over the law enforcement presence in South Bend.** He is the top chief. And if you're having those type of problems when you're directly correlating with it, **then how are you going to do it on a broad horizon?**" – Male*

Though they appreciate his tone and composure generally, much like the post-debate groups in Iowa, these voters really **felt the Mayor lacked passion, anger and "pizazz."** They want to see some force and fire when discussing difficult things – no tiptoeing around.

*"**It was too careful for me.** I mean I know he couldn't be emotional about it, but it's just what he said was no different than what we see all the time, and we want something different. Like after the police shoots somebody, I don't need you to stand up and be careful to me because you don't want to step on somebody's toes. **Listen, he has his bodycam off, somebody dead, and like that man said, somebody should have no job. It's good to talk about investigating whoever you want to, but I don't want to hear that.**" – Female, 40+*

*"**It was kind of calm.** It wasn't what I was looking for like something – I don't know. I don't know. I was just waiting for him to say something like how Kamala Harris spoke like **he was so serious.**" – Female, <40*

[Exchange – Women, <40]



Female 1: "I think he did a good job being neutral to be honest with you because sometimes when a person of his caliber is strong, **some people take it as being extra or exaggerating and things like that.**"

Female 2: "But that's somebody's life so **he should be a little bit extra** I think because if that was my child, I would..."

For the most part, they saw him as genuine, sincere and remorseful.

"Just looking at him and listening to him, **it didn't sound very calculated.** It sounded like he really, really gave it – it came from his heart." – Female, 40+

"I put **heartbroken** because he talked about the mother looking her – no matter what he says, it's not going to bring her son back, and I said, do better, like **he wants to be able to fix things**, improve whatever issues that are going on so that it's better, so that doesn't happen again." – Female, 40+

A few voters – men and young women – felt like the entirety of the blame for South Bend not having a diverse police force can't only rest on Mayor Pete because it's not easy to find Black people who *want* the job.

"I feel **it can't all be put on him.** I mean as far as they're talking about just raising Black people, I feel just some don't want to go into arrangement of being an officer because of what's going on." – Female, <40

"I mean we publicize rappers and everything else, but I mean somebody needs to stand up and say, '**Hey, police got a problem. Why don't you all be a police?**'" – Male

"I just think it's hard for young Black men coming from Black communities to go be police officers. Because growing up in that, **you see all the negatives that go on.**" – Male

His response to the other candidates on stage came across firm and smart: voters noted the Mayor's respect for an ongoing investigation in the face of what seemed like – for some – an unrealistic suggestion of firing the police chief.

[Exchange – Women, 40+]

Moderator: "His response was strong?"

Female: "I thought so. As soon as the first guy finished, he was like 'I have to say something to that' and **not allowing them to just move on and brush past it.**"

"I mean it's kind of like...It's not that he didn't hear them, but **it's more like, 'Okay, well, you handled yours. We're working on it on my end.'**" – Female, 40+

But the suggestion of firing the police chief wasn't completely rejected because seeing a candidate who will take concrete action – especially in as serious a situation as this – is practically table stakes for them. Like the voters in Iowa, **they'll demand more from him once the investigation is over**



The Douglass Plan was well received and his contextualizing the problem as systemic racist left voters' interest piqued.

*"Wow...something that should have been years ago and **this problem that we got now has manifested into something ugly**, and the only way we're going to change this is start now and just plan. He does sound like he got something going on." – Male*

*"When he was talking about like marijuana possession, like Black men getting four times more than anybody else. **That kind of sticks out too**. To be honest with you, there's more Caucasian, White cops in Black areas than Black cops in White areas, and it's going to be like that until it kind of changes." – Male*

Though for some he was describing a problem that they know all too well without any actionable solutions on the table. They were left wanting detailed plans for *how* the Mayor will fix systemic racism and all the areas of their lives it touches – education, healthcare, economic equality, etc.

*"I thought it was interesting, **but I didn't hear anything about – what's the plan?** I mean we all know the problems. You're just telling me the problems, but you're not telling me what one thing in the plan can be able to fix any of those problems, and that would've been great." – Female, 40+*

*"I think everything he said is true about Black America versus White America. **I would have liked to know the action plan**. But I'm interested now. I want to go look up the website?" – Female, <40*

*"I felt like he was saying but I guess **I was waiting for what the plan actually was**."*
– Female, <40

While applauding him for his recognition of the obstacles African Americans face in America, there were a few who weren't totally convinced Mayor Pete has what it takes to tackle a problem this big, especially in the face of Congress.

[Exchange – Women, 40+]

*Female 1: "My only issue is when he gets into Congress and **he's met with a 72-year-old who's been there for eight years...**"*

Female 2: "Mitch McConnell."

Female 1: "...how does that work?"

*"I believe that **his intent is great but it's just not** – I think there's that big misconception like she was talking about before that the president can just fix everything. **It's so much trying to get things through, laws passed and changed that**." – Female, <40*

*"I just think he doesn't have – just from watching this because before now I haven't heard of him, but **he seems like his intentions are good, but he just maybe doesn't have the answer**." – Female, 40+*

Regardless, most everyone in the groups felt that he is someone that takes racial injustice and inequality seriously.



*“Yes, like **he wants to help**, whether he has the answers or not, but **I feel the sincerity in his intent**.” – Female, 40+*

[Exchange – Women, 40+]

Moderator: “So do you feel like Mayor Pete is just a well-meaning white guy? Do you really feel like he gets it or...”

*Female: “I think he has no choice because he’s a gay man. I mean he’s not just reaching, **he experiences some of the things we do**.”*

But that doesn’t mean that they relate to him or feel affinity for him – a quality Biden has a leg up on.

[Exchange – Men]

*Male: He is passionate but I don’t know if he can relate to a lot of Black people. I mean **it’s hard to be something that you’re not**, but you can try to look at it. I mean – I don’t know.*

Moderator: What makes you say you don’t think he will relate to a lot of Black people?

Male: Because he is not Black. [Laughter]

Moderator: Biden isn’t Black but you all said he was relatable.

*Male: **I know. Because of Obama.***

Reaction to Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow/PUSH Coalition

For the older women, **talking about faith was a real winner** and pushed them past their doubts. **But the context of criticizing the GOP was key to unlocking them** – they understood immediately that he was slapping down Republicans for false beliefs and loved that he was taking the fight to them and seizing religion back for our side.

- Continuing to talk about immigration in this context will likely resonate with them as well, as this was a particularly heartbreaking subject for them.
- The Mayor has a unique strength in his ability to deliver pointed, harsh burns to hypocrites and bigots in positions of power, demonstrating that he’s witty, tough and will call out BS when he sees it. More of this.

*“**He moved me**, I like the fact that he threw some scriptures in there.” – Female, 40+*

*“Yes, but to me, it was just like, ‘**Okay, here’s your scripture**, Republicans. The bible says this right here, you all aren’t doing this.’ – Female, 40+*

*“**He moves you. I felt him**, and then I also – people would think because he’s gay, that he wouldn’t have that religious side to him, and when he threw that in the mix, **that roped some people in**. I’m pretty sure it did.” – Female, 40+*

Other groups didn’t recognize the reference to supposedly Christian Republicans as readily and talk of his faith was less appealing. They also did not recognize the passages from Scripture as readily as the older women, who embraced it and saw it as a rebuke of “Two Corinthians” Trump.



*"I saw that he **threw the God thing in there** and I was just wondering. It made me think 'Did he just throw that in there because it was Jesse Jackson?'" – Female, <40*

*"I just feel like I don't know. Personally, **I would prefer him not to bring in God or religion.**" – Female, <40*

And for the men, while calling out white nationalists was admirable and showed some guts...

[Exchange – Men]

Moderator: "How about the fact that he addressed White nationalism in that? What did you think about that? Was that a good feel?"

*Male 1: "**Wow. That was brave...**"*

Male 1: "That took some - my goodness."

*Male 2: "He **doesn't come off as a gay candidate.**"*

*"I like the last one even though he didn't get a lot of claps and stuff, but I liked what he was saying. I mean I really did enjoy what he was saying. And how we was saying it. Like I told you, he sounded like Kennedy, John F. Kennedy...**He talked about white nationalism.**" – Male*

...Some found him a little stiff and dispassionate – and they were looking to the audience for their cues. When they didn't hear raucous applause they were skeptical, again underscoring that they need to see enthusiasm from other. A couple of them saw his faith talk as disingenuous given his sexuality.

*"I don't think that - I think he is trying to say - I don't want to put words in his mouth, **but he is just stoic.** He is not – seems like **he is not passionate** about what he is talking about, and that's because he don't move a lot. He don't do a lot of facial expressions, he is just a stoic individual." – Male*

*"How can you refer to God when a lot of people think **you're living ungodly?** You know what I'm saying?" – Male*

This idea that he's just saying all the right things to appeal to them recurred several times, particularly with the younger women, who will need to see him making similar arguments in front of white audiences so they truly believe him. They don't know him well enough to know if he walks the walk.

*"Yes. I was just wondering if he just threw that **in there because of [being at Jesse Jackson's]** because it sounds good. I was just waiting for him to say more about that. It was like he was going to go in. Then, it stopped." – Female, <40*

*"I think it **sounded scripted towards who he felt the audience was.** I would like to see him just give a speech and say the same things in front of non-Black people."*
– Female, <40

*"It's a political ploy, because **Black people love their religions,** so he talked about God, is more people are talking about it." – Men*



Biden and The Obama Effect

The affinity voters in these groups feel for Joe Biden is deep and strong, rooted in his relationship with Barack Obama who is the ultimate validator. **It's hard to underestimate the power of the Obama association with these voters.** While Biden's support in IA and NH appears somewhat shallow, the bonds with the voters in these groups seem harder to break.

[Exchange – Men]

Moderator: "Who in the race right now do you think can beat Trump?"

Male: "Biden."

Moderator: "The reason you say Biden is?"

Male: "Obama."

*Moderator: "**Because he has that Obama connection?**"*

*Male: "**Yes, ma'am.**"*

*"Actually, my decision will be a lot based on who **Obama's going for.**" – Female, 40+*

They are incredibly forgiving of Biden's flaws and foibles, in part because the Obama halo suggests he's a good man with good intentions at his core.

- Voters in the older women and men's groups were aware of Biden's history and recalled individual transgressions – touching women inappropriately, the 1994 crime bill, busing, etc. But because their guy Barack chose him as his VP, **they feel like Biden has already been vetted.**

[Exchange – Women, 40+]

*Female 1: "That [segregation] when he talked about working with the [segregationists]. I think his screw up there was when he said, "They never called me boy. They called me son." Well, **they never would have** because he was not African American. They would never have called him boy. I understand what he was trying to say and those moments he has to forget that he doesn't know that there is still a difference."*

Female 2: "I agree."

*Female 1: "He's a **product of his time.**"*

Female 2: "That's right. Right."

*Female 1: "If you look at his age and consider that, I don't think that – **to me is not a strike against him.**"*

[Exchange – Women, 40+]

*Female 1: "Some people are **just huggers.** Some people don't like to be hugged and if I don't like it I [can say something]."*

Female 2: "If he's doing it to be a pervert, that's different then."

Female 1: "Right. It's the intentions."

*Female 2: "I don't think that's the case. **I really think that he's just being himself** and it caught him at a place where it was unacceptable for some."*

*"I think also he's been vetted **so we know that there's not really going to be any skeletons** coming out of his closet." – Female, 40+*



When they think about who can beat Trump, these voters go with Biden – no other name truly surfaced in response to this question.

[Exchange – Men]

Moderator: "Is there anyone in the race right now that you think can beat Trump, anyone you know you're fully confident in that can beat Trump?"

*Male: "**Biden**"*

Moderator: "The reason you say Biden is?"

Male: "His experience in the White House."

He may have been in Washington a long time, but this experience is a positive for them – he knows the ins and outs and can reach across the aisle. After someone like Trump, one man thought voters would welcome a traditional political career background.

[Exchange – Women, 40+]

*Moderator: "Which ones embody those? Past history, win ability, Obama [endorsement], stands up to Trump, relatability, **reaches across the room?**"*

Female: "Biden."

*"Because **he has a lot of political experience**. I think that the country went in a different direction four years ago because they were tired of Washington. I think they got their feel of a non-political person in a president and I truly think that the next selection will have another political person in the president." – Male*

Having been Obama's right-hand man, there was also the sentiment that he's by proxy a funny, relatable and cool guy.

- We saw the "cool guy" theme come up a handful of times in the Iowa/New Hampshire qualitative research as well – mostly with young men who thought Pete lacked "cool". We should keep an eye on whether it's a real issue and figure out whether validators can help.

[Exchange – Men]

Moderator: Because he was a vice president. Any other reasons you think Joe Biden is one of the ones that can beat Trump?

*Male: **Because he's cool**. [Laughter]*

[Exchange – Men]

Moderator: "Biden isn't Black but you all said he was relatable."

*Respondent: "**I know. Because of Obama.**"*

*"I think I pick up kind of going back to with Obama, it seems like at least to me, [Biden] **was believable, relate to the people, it seemed like he cared**. I know everyone has their own agenda but he was believable to me." – Female, <40*

A few voters were concerned about Biden's age, but it didn't appear to be an actual barrier that would prevent them from voting for him; more of a pause. His experience *with Obama* outweighed this potential downside.

[Exchange – Men]



Moderator: "What's the worry about his age? What's the concern?"

Male 1: "He'll be 84 or 85 after his first term, the **oldest president we would have in history.**"

Male 2: "Another thing talking about his age, if you look at the presidents, when they first go to office versus when they finish their three or four years, they **age very quickly** because of the stress."

The response from these voters suggested that "experience" is really a proxy for a sense of being proven and tested – it's less about lines on a resume that confidence that you've got the grit and resilience it takes.

[Exchange, Women, 40+ re confidence in Biden]

Female, 1: "If I can be honest, **that's not the only thing but him working with Obama** for all those years, that's just a big."

Female 2: "Yeah and you got to see a lot of his personality and who he was and you can **trace back his history**, like he said, with Martin Luther King. You can see he was out there being an activist and doing things that."

Biden – Kamala Exchange

Because of the strong affinity they have for Joe Biden, these voters were not nearly as impressed with Kamala's moment as some of the (white) voters we've talked to in Iowa and New Hampshire.

[Exchange – Women, 40+]

Moderator: "So what's your view of how Kamala handled it?"

Female 1: "**She's aggressive.**"

Female 2: "**Trustworthiness went out the door** because [Kamala] will never be on topic with something. [She] will try to garner that **Black vote and that Black sympathy and speak to us as if we are less.**"

Young women were a little confused by the busing issue itself and required some explanation from the moderator.

[Exchange – Women, <40]

Female 1: "What she's saying was by that, what does she mean by that, actually on a bus or what was she saying, what does she mean by that?"

Moderator: "Anyone have the same question with Brandy, they didn't understand the comment to busing? [A few heads nodding – moderator explains.]"

While some of the women gave her plaudits for her passion and the men appreciated that it was smart strategy...

"To me, it seemed like she was kind of hurt by this thing, **she was getting teary-eyed about it.** It was something that really bothered her. I do feel like [Biden] kind of just pushed it under the rug." – Female, <40



"If anybody watched it, I feel like she spoke for people who couldn't really speak to him personally. Honestly, I felt a little, wow, maybe that kind of happened to me some way somehow or somebody else in my home. So wow." – Female, <40

[Exchange – Men]

*Male: "I thought it was a **great political strategy on her part**. On the first debate, you go after the frontrunner or everybody's considering as the frontrunner. To show that in the first debate, I thought it was brilliant."*

Moderator: "So the strategy was good?"

*Male: "Yes, the strategy was good, plus the fact that she chose that topic because **she's basically trying to pull in a lot of the Black voters** that he typically would have from Obama and all."*

...Attacking Biden felt "below the belt" to some older women – particularly on an issue (busing) they felt was obscure.

*"It was a **victim mentality more than anything**. I think she took it and she took it all the way left as if, 'Hey, this is what happened and I have never recovered.' She's still stuck." – Female, 40+*

*"For me, when I think about the whole faceoff, I think **it was a different time**. Right. It was a different time and even with her, I think she used it against him. **I don't think it was fair**." – Female, 40+*

*"I just feel **like it wasn't relevant**. Why would you even bring that up?" – Female, 40+*

[Exchange – Women, 40+]

*Female 1: "Look at where she's at. Get over yourself. I was a product of busing. It does **make me lose respect for her**."*

Female 2: "Respondent: Yeah, me too."

They worked hard to find ways to give Biden credit for his response to her. One man's response seemed telling.

*"I thought he was a little jumpy but I started to remember he was Obama's vice president. **Obama chose him, so Obama obviously saw some good in him** or he would not have appointed him as vice president. I can't forget that. So, I know Biden probably grew up back in the day. Back then, everybody had the same thoughts a lot of them had about us back in the day and then, sometimes you have to grow out of it eventually. **I feel Obama liked the guy and he always praised him and he was the vice president**. I thought he did a good job." – Male*

For some, his demeanor came across as composed, strong and classy because he didn't stoop to Harris' level and hit back in the face of an unfair attack.

*"I mean he didn't let it get him out of character. **He stood his ground** like he had absorbed what she said, thought about how he's going to respond and he responded." – Male*



*"How he responded was that he did stay **calm and relaxed, and that he didn't get frazzled** unlike our current president where he just totally blows off." – Male*

[Exchange – Women 40+]

Female 1: "He never did criticize her or judge her."

*Female 2: "**He could have.**"*

Female 3: "He just went into the straight this is where I am on the politics."

Though a few felt like he was caught off guard...

*"Biden was **definitely caught off guard** by the comments and he had to use his experience. He had to use what he's done and his track record to try to defend what she said." – Male*

*"I think it **should be a learning experience for him**, that moving forward he's going to have to address his record." – Female*

...They're not giving up on him – he'll be ready next time.

*"I think he'll be ready...because if you recall, when Obama had issues during both times, you see those and you come back better. You correct those mistakes so I think **what we'll see next week is going to be a different Biden** we saw the first time too because I think he also didn't know how strong some of these others are."*

A few young women were clearly unsettled after learning a little more about busing itself. This combined with the inappropriate touching are things they're skeptical about and want to know more about.

[Exchange – Women, <40]

Female: "I said for me, it just keeps it at the forefront as a reminder."

Moderator: "Just as a reminder. What does it remind you about?"

*Female: "**I mean it kind of makes me want to go dig some more to see what else he did.** Or just kind of maybe things that come that he may say, it's going to make me maybe think about those things differently or just kind of."*

The response to Kamala was fairly muted. They see potential in her ("great VP") but do worry that America won't elect a Black woman. They see her as clever, passionate and hungry for the win, but aren't totally sold on her yet.

*"The same with Kamala Harris, I like her. I don't know if she would be able to beat Trump as a president. I think if she didn't make it for the president, **she may be a good VP.**"*

– Female, <40

[Exchange – Women <40]

Moderator: "After watching Harris' performance, does that make you more inclined to push her a little higher on your list or not?"

*Respondent: "Not really because to be honest with you, I forgot who said it, **she will make an absolute great VP.**"*



***"I'm a little shaky with Harris. I want to get more from her but she's on the possible list for me."** – Female, 40+*



APPENDIX

If the Mayor were an animal, what animal would he be? [Verbatims]

Animal	Description
Elephant (x2)	1.) Because of memory and knowing things. 2.) I felt like he was somewhat gentle, but he will get you. He's going to bite you back.
Eagle	He's soaring and he can kind of look down and see.
Bear	They're protective of the cubs.
Pitbull (x2)	1.) Maybe he could be a nice pit-bull...Because I think he'll bite back. 2.) A pit-bull puppy because they're strong and they want to protect and they have great intentions but it's just you've got to grow
Dog	I mean young enough who's nice and at the same time...He'll snap at you.
Otter	I feel like he looks like one to me, an otter
Sheep	Sheep are pure and white...it's like they're part of a herd. It's like in this group of people, but then again, we know you're genuine. We know you mean it.
Kangaroo	Everyone loves him but I never want to get into a fight with him especially if they're trying to protect something.
Sloth	It's like we're waiting for him to come with more...It's like he's slow when it's coming to me in my own opinion.
Pitbull puppy	They have great intentions but they got to grow a little bit.
Sheep	* * *
Fox	He is not quite big enough to be a wolf and he is calculating with his words, and he seems to care.
Golden retriever	He is colorful and – I'm not trying to categorize him the same way – but sometimes he is with his husband and they're like colorful, they're like flamboyant.
Koala bear	If you look at koala bear they just seem all sleepy and calm, but if you get them upset they let out this blood curling howl that you never really expect that out of them, and that's what I could see out of him.
Cheetah	You got Biden, he's an old guy, he is like the lion, you know, and then you got the female lion. And he is small, he wants it to be done quickly. He looks like he is fast. When you look at him, he looks like a kid.
Teddy bear	He just has that teddy bear face, just like calm.

